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MASS MEDIA IN THE FAMILY SETTING:

Social Patterns in Media Availability and Use by Parents

Report on a Study of

AMERICA'S CHILDREN AND THE MASS MEDIA

March 1980

NEWSPAPER READERSHIP PROJECT

This study is one of a series of research studies conducted under the auspices of the Newspaper Readership Project, an industry-wide effort to promote circulation and readership.

AMERICA'S CHILDREN AND THE MASS MEDIA

PREFACE

In June 1978, the Newspaper Advertising Bureau conducted a nationwide study of how children and adolescents use and feel about the media -- TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, movies, comic books, and books. Personal interviews were conducted by the Child Research Service Inc.-Center for Family Research in a probability sample of 817 households with 1,156 children and with their mothers. The children interviewed in these households constitute a nationally representative sample of 6 to 17 year-olds in American homes.

The detailed findings of this survey are presented in a series of reports analyzing the family settings in which the children are being raised and their parents' media habits and attitudes; the children's use of newspapers; their media world; and their newspaper use in America's classrooms. A separate technical report describes the sampling plan, questionnaires, and field work procedures employed for this survey. Earlier NAB publications based on findings from the study include a booklet, Children, Mothers and Newspapers, that provided an initial overview of major findings, and a report, Children, Movie-Going and the Newspaper, that analyzes the film preferences and habits of the children.

Responsibility for the study design, analysis and report-writing was shared equally by Albert E. Gollin and Thelma Anderson of NAB's Research Department.

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HIGHLIGHTS

Families that comprise a representative sample of American households with children age 6 to 17 were interviewed as part of a nationwide study of the media habits and attitudes of children and their mothers. Data for this report come from the sample of mothers, who provided information on household characteristics and family media use. Here are the principal findings:

1. Great variations exist in the economic and social character of the family settings within which children are initially -- and most heavily -- exposed to all mass media. These differences affect the availability of some media -- newspapers in particular -- and the extent of their use in many significant ways. A cluster of attributes define the special situations of children growing up in households with both parents or only one parent present. Most children in the latter households are doubly disadvantaged when it comes to access to newspapers and other print media and to the subtle encouragement to the development of their reading habits that is represented by their parents' own reliance on the printed word.

2. Newspapers are <u>available</u> in nine out of ten homes regularly or occasionally, taking both dailies and Sunday papers into account. Dailies enter the homes of 70% of families on all five weekdays, and a Sunday or weekend edition is available to 71% on all four weekends. These proportions varied only marginally in the homes of children of differing ages, but differed greatly among families at different class levels. Nonwhite and single-parent households took a daily or Sunday paper significantly less often than other types of families.

3. Newspaper <u>readership</u> followed the same lines of social cleavage as availability, being generally higher on all measures in families with higher social or economic status for mothers and fathers alike. The Sunday paper is read more often than the daily paper in most families.

4. Four parts of the daily paper are most often read by mothers: local news (by 73%), national news (by 55%), personal advice columns (by 49%), and the women's pages (by 47%). Better-educated mothers were more faithful readers of twelve out of nineteen specific types of editorial content, and showed stronger than average interest in hard news of all types, as did working mothers.

5. Mothers are aware of their children's newspaper reading and hold highly favorable attitudes toward their children's reading of newspapers, not only in general but in classrooms as well. Mothers

in higher-status families endorsed the idea more warmly, but the level of approval was substantial for children of all ages and at all class levels.

6. Children also receive a good deal of positive encouragement to read newspapers in the form of parental highlighting of specific items in the paper: 70% of them have things in the paper brought to their attention by their mothers. Again, availability and parental readership affect the likelihood that mothers talk about items in the paper with their children, thus stimulating their interest in newspaper content.

7. Television occupies a central place in the homes and media diets of families with children in these age groups. Almost three households in five have more than one set, and over one-third of the children (35%) have a set available for their personal use. The older the child and the more favored the family background the more likely is this to be the case.

8. TV sets are on an average of six hours a day, and are watched by mothers for an average of nearly three of those hours. Watching is heavier among parents who are lower in social-economic status, especially by mothers.

9. The prevailing family climates surrounding children's watching of TV contain ambivalent elements. More than three-quarters (77%) of the children had mothers who approved of them watching TV, but rules about the programs deemed appropriate or the amount of TV-watching time parents felt was acceptable often accompanied this general attitude of approval, especially in the case of the youngest group of children. Setting rules varied with the ages of the children and to some extent with the family's social class. Children's program viewing was controlled frequently by parental suggestions about what to watch, as well as by restrictions that parents may seek to impose.

10. The radio is a standard fixture in all American households, turned on for an average of 3-1/3 hours, and listened to by mothers about two-thirds of that time. Music, news, weather and talk shows form the main staples in their daily radio diet; radio seems to accompany mothers' daily round of activities without prejudice to their uses of other media. They were aware of their children's radio listening and approved of it as an activity.

11. Parents' use of books and magazines was also studied for the light it can shed on general family orientations to print media. One or more magazines is brought into the home of 72% of the children, and an estimated 21 books are bought or borrowed by parents in the average year. Use of these print media is strongly affected by family social class level: those with more education or higher family incomes

make correspondingly heavier use of books and magazines. As many as one-half of children in lower status families rarely if ever see their mother or father reading a book.

12. Parental values about children's book and magazine reading are strongly inclined in a favorable direction. Reading is a good thing, an attitude held even by parents who do little reading themselves. They are alert to the children's own reading practices and try to influence the kind of things brought into the home in a majority of cases. Positive efforts to encourage children's reading habits are frequently made, especially when the children are young, by buying them books as gifts and by reading to them.

13. News entering the home through the mass media is substantial in volume, judging by the extent to which mothers say they themselves read or hear it on a daily basis. The vital contribution that news can make to children's educational and social development is one of the reasons often mentioned as a basis for approving of newspapers and television for children.

14. Families do not simply accept the agenda of national concerns set out in news coverage by the mass media, but shape their own agenda according to the potential or actual impact of issues or topics on the family itself. This is evident in the prominence accorded to each of ten newsworthy topics in family conversations. Matters of more immediate or pressing concern dominated; news about local and national government or foreign affairs were rarely discussed with any frequency.

15. The family emerges from these findings as exerting an active force in shaping the environment that surrounds children's experiences with and changing uses of the mass media in their childhood and adolescent years. Parental values and media uses vary considerably, primarily along social class lines. The crucial mediating role that parents play -- in making media available to children, providing them with models of adult behavior, and stimulating or regulating their use for the children -- needs to be kept in mind in devising strategies for increasing newspaper reading among children. One route to achieving this goal over the long term is by better serving the <u>current</u> needs of their parents on a continuing basis.

INTRODUCTION

How do children form their mass media habits and interests, as well as the attitudes they take toward media content? How do children's interests in news about the wider world grow or change as they mature, in relation to their other life interests? How do access to the media and climates of approval or disapproval -- largely determined by parental or family media practices -- affect the children's own media behavior? And what is the place of newspapers in these developmental trends?

The purpose of this study of children, adolescents and their mothers, whose findings are reported in a series of Newspaper Readership Project publications, is to answer the questions posed above: to show how mass media interests and behavior are formed and changed during the ages between six and seventeen; to identify the roles played by family, school and other influences in these developmental processes; and to produce findings or refine methods derived from a nationwide survey that can serve as benchmarks for others who may wish to study youthful segments of the population in their own communities.

In recent years a substantial body of research has evolved that deals with the ways children acquire a taste for television programming and with some consequences of their extensive TV watching. These studies have grown out of widespread parental and official concerns with violence and with certain forms of advertising on TV as they may

affect children, particularly younger ones. By comparison, research on children's newspaper reading habits or attitudes toward newspaper editorial content and other printed matter is much less prevalent, and findings on these topics often are submerged in the framework of studies of childhood political socialization: the processes by which children learn about the political culture and acquire politically relevant attitudes, values and knowledge. Another aim of this study, therefore, is to fill gaps in available knowledge on children and newspapers by a detailed examination of newspaper use in the childhood and adolescent years.

In this report we will deal primarily with the social environments within which children's media behavior and interests are formed, focusing in particular on the family setting and parental orientations that may color or affect their children's media usage and attitudes. A major goal is to draw a detailed portrait of the extent and character of mass media use in the families of the children we have studied. The variables introduced here will reappear in other reports that document their role as influences upon children's media attitudes and behavior, directly or indirectly shaping their media perceptions, evaluations of media content, and their exposure to the mass media during their formative years.

Sampling Children and Their Families

The data reported here came primarily from interviews with the mother or other principal child-caring adult in a national probability

sample of 817 households from which 1,156 children age 6 to 17 were also selected for interviewing. Interviews were conducted at 70 locations in thirty states, following a sampling plan that gave appropriate weight to region, population size, and household distribution in urban, suburban and rural areas.[1] No more than two children per eligible household were interviewed; all households initially contacted that had one or more children age 6-17 were defined as eligible for inclusion in the survey. Nationally, 54% of families contained one or more children under age 18; of these, 56% had one or more age 6-17, according to recent U.S. Government statistics. Thus, our data come from a nationally representative segment of American families, those deemed eligible, rather than from the cross-section samples of all American households that are usually employed in national studies of adult media audiences.

Interviews in eligible households were first sought with the mother or other principal child-caring adult, and then separately with her child or children. Great care was taken by specially trained interviewers from the Child Research Service -- Center for Family Research to ensure both privacy and frankness in the interview and comprehension by even the youngest children of the meaning of the questions. Many visual aids were specially devised to add greater clarity to the questions and response categories. Interviews were

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1) A fuller description of the study's sampling plan and field work procedures is contained in the technical report of the Center for Family Research, which is part of this series of NAB reports on the study of children and adolescents and their mothers.

successfully conducted with a parent in 94% of the families; as 89% of these were with the mother, we will generally refer to "mothers" as the prime source of information on household characteristics and family media use.

Family Demographics

The substantial variations in the social and economic composition of interviewed families provide a firm basis for assessing differences in the general outlook and values that underlie use of the mass media by parents and children. The basic demographic data on the families of children in different age groups are shown below (see table 1). Of particular interest are the family structure (households with one or both parents present) and the employment status of the children's mothers. Both are key factors shaping parent-child interactions, and thus help to determine how pervasive are the influences that parents can exert on their children's media habits and preferences.

A steady growth can be seen in the ranks of working mothers -- especially those employed full time -- in the families of progressively older children. Two-thirds of 6-8 year-old children have non-working mothers, a proportion that declines steadily to 42 percent among older teenagers. While the children's age has much to do with this, economic need and lifestyle aspirations also are factors. As other data show, among mothers in single-parent households, 38 percent work full time, compared with 25 percent in households with both

parents present. And while the proportion of full-time working mothers is similar across social class levels, the proportion of part-time working mothers increases with education and family income, suggesting that a job (and the associated benefits) is coming to be preferred to the housewife's role among women with school-age children.[1]

Almost all of the fathers in various types of households are working full time. Only among non-white fathers (almost 8 percent of whom were unemployed) is there a sizeable departure from the overall unemployment rate of 2 percent. The economic consequences of the absence of a working father are severe: 63 percent of such families earned less than $10,000, compared with only 15 percent of families with a working father in the house.

The educational attainment of the children's parents reflects the national trend of steadily increasing levels in recent decades, especially among their fathers. A high school diploma or some time spent in college is the norm in most families. In addition to its impact on family income, educational attainment has a wide range of direct and indirect effects on attitudes and values, both personal and parental[2], and will be shown to influence the media use of parents and children in a number of important ways.

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1) For data from another recent Readership Project study that strongly supports this view, see Women and the Newspapers in the 1970s (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1979).

2) See Herbert H. Hyman et al., The Enduring Effects of Education (University of Chicago Press, 1975) for a review of findings from numerous studies on this point.

Table 1

Social and Economic Status of Sampled Families
(In Percentages)

Parents' Employment Status		Families of Children Age: 6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17	Total Families
	(N)[1]=	(345)	(283)	(275)	(253)	(817)
Mother works full time		21	24	28	43	27
Mother works part time		13	14	17	14	15
Mother is housewife		66	62	56	42	58
	(N)[2]	(297)	(236)	(236)	(215)	(691)
Father works full time		96	94	97	97	96
	(N)[3]	(266)	(208)	(193)	(170)	(582)
Education of Mother						
Less than high school graduate		25	30	29	28	28
High school graduate		48	45	46	48	46
Some college, plus		27	25	25	23	26
	(N)[4]=	(313)	(249)	(249)	(225)	(727)
Education of Father						
Less than high school graduate		21	27	22	23	22
High school graduate		38	38	44	46	41
Some college, plus		41	35	34	31	37
	(N)[5]	(275)	(216)	(206)	(180)	(610)
Family Income						
Less than $10,000		25	26	26	21	26
$10,000 - $14,999		21	15	8	13	16
$15,000 - $19,999		19	23	20	21	19
$20,000 plus		27	27	36	31	29
Refused/NA		7	9	10	14	10

Table 1

Social and Economic Status of Sampled Families (Continued)
(In Percentages)

	Families of Children Age: 6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17	Total Families
Racial Group					
White	80	79	82	79	80
Black	15	16	14	15	14
Other (Asian, Chicano, etc.)	5	5	4	5	5
Family Structure					
Both male and female heads	80	83	82	81	80
Single parent head	20	17	18	19	20

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1) Percentages in Total Families column are based on adult sample; percentages for children are based on family backgrounds of children in each age group. Unless indicated, percentages are based on total (N) in each column; those not ascertained are generally excluded from bases.

2) Based only on mothers in these three categories.

3) Only employed fathers (93% of all fathers) in families with both parents present are included in percentage base.

4) Based only on mothers who were interviewed; other adults are excluded.

5) Only fathers in families with both parents present are included in percentage base.

As most adult media audience studies have shown, family income is a key variable influencing the use of and preference for certain mass media -- newspapers most notably. Income varied little by the ages of the children in the study: families of older children, as could be expected, had somewhat higher levels. By far the sharpest contrasts among families exist for two-parent vs. single-parent households and between white and non-white families. The proportion of under $10,000 households among single-parent families was 74 percent, compared with only 17 percent of those with both parents present. The difference between white and non-white families was almost equally dramatic: 20 percent of the former vs. 68 percent of the latter earned less than $10,000.

The close relationships that exist among these socioeconomic variables in defining the family situation of the children can be seen clearly in some other differences between two-parent and single-parent households. About four-fifths of children in all four age groups live in households with both parents present. But (as seen in table 2) the two types of families display strikingly different demographic profiles that are not only linked with contrasting use of the mass media, as we will show, but also define social and economic realities that can have generally wideranging effects on child-rearing practices and attitudes. For, as these data show, children growing up in single-parent households in all parts of the country belong to families in which their mothers have far fewer educational advantages,

much less income to draw upon as resources, and are home less because more of them are working.

To round off this snapshot of family demographics, we will briefly review some data on their residential location. Families with children generally sink deeper roots into their communities, so it is not surprising that almost one half (49%) of the families have lived in their current areas for ten years or more -- one-quarter for twenty years or longer. Those with younger children show slightly shorter periods of settling in, and their parents are also somewhat less likely to own homes.

The most significant variations in residential patterns are related to income. Those with incomes under $10,000 are almost twice as likely as those earning more (19% vs. 11%) to have settled in within the past two years. Correlatively, the proportion of home-owning families rises steeply with income: 33% of those earning under $10,000; 71% of those with incomes between $10 - $20,000; and fully 93% of families earning $20,000 or more are home owners. Given this strong relationship, it is not surprising that home ownership is significantly lower among non-white families (38%), single-parent households (31%), and residents of central cities (48%).

In geographic terms, the families were distributed representatively across the nation's four principal regions. Almost one-third lives in the central cities of larger metropolitan areas, and another one-quarter lives in communities in their suburban fringes. Racial and income differences among those living in these locations fell along

Table 2

Characteristics of Single and Two-Parent Households
(In Percentages)

Family/Parental Status[1]		Households with: Both Parents Present	One Parent Present
	(N) =	(655)	(162)
Mother's Employment Status			
Works full time		25	38
Works part time		16	10
Housewife		59	52
	(N)[2] =	(579)	(112)
Mother's Education			
Less than high school graduate		24	47
High school graduate		48	36
Some college, plus		28	17
Family Income			
Less than $10,000		17	74
$10,000 - $19,999		44	19
$20,000 plus		39	7
	(N)[3] =	(583)	(149)
Race			
White		87	55
Non-white		13	45
Geographic Location			
Metro central city		26	56
Suburban fringe		30	12
Small towns and rural		45	32

1) Respondents or families for whom information was not ascertained are excluded from the bases for percentaging.

2) Percentages based only on mothers interviewed who fell into these three categories.

3) Those who refused to supply income data are excluded.

Table 3

Residency and Geographic Distribution of Sampled Families[1]
(In Percentages)

	Families of Children Age:				Total
	6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17	Families
(N) =	(345)	(283)	(275)	(253)	(817)
Residency in Area					
Less than 2 years	17	1	9	10	14
Two up to 9 years	46	39	31	30	38
Ten up to 19 years	17	24	31	31	24
Twenty years plus	20	24	28	29	25
Housing Status					
Owns home	67	66	74	72	68
Rents home	33	34	26	28	32
(N) =	(327)	(271)	(260)	(243)	(780)
Geographic Region					
Northeast	24	26	28	26	26
North Central	27	24	27	30	27
South	35	37	31	24	31
West	15	14	14	20	16
Geographic Location					
Metro central city	32	34	33	33	32
Suburban fringe	25	24	29	27	26
Small towns and rural	43	42	38	41	42

1) See Footnote 1, Table 1, for definitions of bases for percentages.

familiar lines. Two-thirds (66%) of non-white families live in central city areas, vs. only 23 percent of white families. And, while almost one-half (48%) of the lowest income group lives in central cities, only 25 percent of families earning over $20,000 did so.

To summarize, the demography of these American families appears to be most sharply differentiated along class and racial lines. Closely linked with both of these is the presence of both parents or only one parent in the children's households. Taken together, these are the salient social factors that chiefly define the varied family settings within which the media habits of children are initially formed and undergo changes as they mature.

MASS MEDIA IN THE FAMILY SETTING

The looming presence of the mass communications media in the average American household is by now a well-established fact. The generation of children studied here, born in the decades of the 1960s and early 1970s, are the inheritors of successive media explosions in America in the post-war era. The sights, sounds, and texts of broadcast and print media have formed ever-present elements in the web of communications that surrounds them in their homes. Thus, as we will show, unlike earlier generations, for whom first radio and then television emerged to compete for attention with newspapers and other print media, the children we studied have for the most part been exposed to all the major media from their earliest days. Moreover, the familiarity and attractiveness of the media as objects of interest are quite likely to have been reinforced by the attention paid to them by the children's parents, thus adding to their intrinsic appeals the stamp of wholesale acceptance by the most important figures in children's lives.

This section will be devoted to a portrayal of the extent to which the mass media have been incorporated into the households of today's children, and their own parents' use of and attitudes toward the media. Underlying the analysis of these facts is the assumption that media availabilities and parental attitudes (expressed both in words and actions) are prime determinants of children's perceptions

and use of the mass media, especially in the earliest years when parental authority and influence are at their highest levels. This assumption will be tested subsequently in other analyses of the children's own media use patterns.

Availability of Newspapers in the Home

Daily or Sunday newspapers are available in the homes of nine out of ten American families on a regular or occasional basis during the average month. But the extent of availability is by no means uniform. While home delivery is of course the key factor underlying availability in three out of five homes, daily papers are brought into the homes, regularly or occasionally, by almost two-thirds (64%) of those who don't get home delivery. Thus, the penetration of the daily newspaper on all five weekdays amounts to 70 percent of households. Only one home in six (16%) fails to take a daily paper with any frequency, a proportion that varied little among families with younger or older children.

Availability of a daily paper on a regular basis is affected by a number of factors. Younger children have younger parents and newspapers are taken less often by young adults. Thus, the proportion of homes taking a daily paper regularly rises slightly in homes of progressively older children. But availability depends less on age than upon the social class factors highlighted earlier: income, education, race, and family structure. For example, home delivery varied with the mother's education, rising from 40 percent in homes

where she failed to earn a high school diploma up to 74 percent in the homes of college-trained mothers. Differences in income levels are equally sharp: only one-third of families with incomes under $10,000 had home delivery, compared with 74 percent of homes with family incomes over $20,000. Two-thirds of white households vs. 31 percent of non-white homes had a daily paper delivered; correlatively, in only 34 percent of single-parent households (vs. 66% in two-parent homes) was a paper delivered daily.

Variations in Sunday newspaper availability were equally marked, and the same social factors emerge as significant correlates of its regular or occasional appearance in the children's homes. Only one home in five (19%) failed to take a Sunday or weekend paper at least once a month, either by delivery or purchase, a proportion that hardly varied in homes of younger or older children. But one-third of homes with incomes below $10,000 or where mothers were not high school graduates took no Sunday paper. An equally high proportion (34%) of single-parent homes failed to take at least one Sunday paper in the month.

Among those getting a daily paper, either delivered or purchased, 62 percent took an afternoon paper and 48 percent had a morning paper. Only minor demographic variations in this overall split existed among these families. As these figures suggest, differences linked with the prevalence of <u>two-a-day</u> newspaper households account for some of the variation. Here again, social class factors play a substantial role. Families more favorably situated generally showed proportionately

Table 4

Daily and Sunday Newspaper Availability in Children's Homes
(In Percentages)

	Families of Children Age: 6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17	Total Families
(N) =	(345)	(283)	(275)	(253)	(817)
Home Delivery of Daily Papers	57	58	64	65	60
Paper Brought Into Home					
Five days a week	23	26	27	32	27
No (0) weekdays	34	36	36	36	36
Average No. Weekdays	2.0	2.1	2.1	2.3	2.1
(N)[1] =	(147)	(119)	(99)	(89)	(330)
Daily Household Newspaper Availability					
All five weekdays	69	70	74	78	70
Some weekdays	17	13	13	11	14
No (0) weekdays	14	17	13	11	16
Home Delivery of Sunday/ Weekend Paper	59	58	62	64	60
Sunday Paper Brought Into Home					
All four Sundays	24	32	32	37	28
No (0) Sundays	44	43	42	38	44
Average No. Sundays	1.5	1.7	1.8	2.0	1.6
(N)[2] =	(140)	(119)	(105)	(92)	(328)
Total Monthly Sunday Paper Availability					
All four Sundays	69	71	74	77	71
Some Sundays	12	10	7	7	10
No (0) Sundays	19	19	19	16	19
Daily & Sunday Penetration					
Every day (weekdays & Sundays)	60	62	66	70	62
Some weekdays or Sundays	30	29	24	20	28
No weekdays or Sundays	10	9	10	10	10

1) Based only on families not getting home delivery of a daily paper. Those bringing a daily home some days are not shown.

2) Based only on families not getting home delivery of a Sunday paper. Those bringing a Sunday paper home occasionally are not shown.

greater availability of both a.m. and p.m. papers. Geographic factors linked with the publishing times of the local dailies were also of some importance. The proportions of a.m. and p.m. newspaper households were as follows: in central cities, 56% and 50%; in the suburbs, 60% and 65%; and in small towns and rural areas, 34% and 69%. The only social category with greater a.m. than p.m. newspaper availability (62% vs. 44%) were non-white families; this reversal of the overall pattern stems largely from the clustering of non-white households in major metropolitan areas dominated by morning newspapers.

Newspaper penetration levels in the homes of children with different social and economic backgrounds show patterns that have been observed in other newspaper audience research based on cross-section samples of all American households.[1] What this sample of families enables us to pinpoint precisely is the availability of the newspaper in the specific milieus within which America's children are being raised. The data show clearly that social and economic factors are important not only as correlates of newspaper availability among today's adult population; they also affect the chances that newspapers will be familiar elements in the homes of the future generation. For as other studies have suggested, newspaper availability during childhood plays a significant role in the forming of adult readership habits.[2]

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1) See for example, The Daily Diet of News (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1978), which reports data from a 1977 nationwide survey of over 3,000 households.

2) For findings from the same nationwide readership survey that support this conclusion, see The Influence of Childhood Exposure to Newspapers on Adult Newspaper Habits (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1977).

These factors form a penetration barrier that has to be surmounted if tomorrow's newspaper audience is to be assured.

Parental Newspaper Readership

Availability offers the most direct means of fostering or actually encouraging children's reading of newspapers in the home. But their parent's reading habits can provide them with powerful models of appropriate or desirable adult behavior. Parental readership of and dependence on newspapers (and the other media) -- for news, entertainment, and consumer information -- establish images in their children's minds of how adults orient themselves to the wider world outside the family. The lessons are more easily learned and perhaps make a more indelible impression by being caught rather than taught, as are most values or attitudes acquired in parent-child interaction.

Parental readership of the daily newspaper generally follows the patterns described earlier for availability of newspapers in the home, as one would expect (see table 5). More mothers of older children tended to read a paper regularly, and they were more likely to have read a paper yesterday. Sixty percent of the mothers are regular readers and two-thirds read a daily paper yesterday. The man in the house, according to his wife's report, was even more likely to be a regular newspaper reader, especially in the homes of older children. (These findings echo those found in other studies of age differences in adult newspaper reading, and thus obviously stem from the parents' ages, not those of their children.) Readership of a Sunday or weekend

paper is substantial: 72 percent of mothers in homes receiving it reported reading it all four Sundays, and only 6 percent didn't read at least one issue. Thus, as between the two, the Sunday newspaper seems to have a more devoted following than the daily paper in the families of today's generation of children.

As was true of variations in availability, social class differences in daily newspaper readership are profound, and differences in Sunday readership only slightly less so (see table 6). Depending upon the indicator chosen, mothers in the highest status categories (i.e., better educated, highest family income) show daily readership levels that are between one-third and two-thirds higher than mothers in the lowest category. Allied to these findings are sharp differences in readership levels by race and family structure. Better than two-thirds of mothers in white families or in two-parent households were yesterday readers, vs. one half of mothers in single-parent or non-white homes. Sunday paper readership levels show similar (though less profound) differences among families in different class or racial categories.

Data from the survey on the daily newspaper reading of the children's fathers (not shown here) display the same wide-ranging class-related differences. One clear inference from these findings is that children from families in less fortunate circumstances are doubly affected adversely in their chances to develop newspaper reading habits. They are less likely to find a newspaper in their homes, and the strong example that can be provided by parents with regular

Table 5

Newspaper Reading of Parents: Daily and Sunday
(In Percentages)

	Families of Children Age: 6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17	Total Families
(N) =	(345)	(283)	(275)	(253)	(817)
Read a Daily Paper Yesterday[1]	63	64	71	74	66
Mother's Daily Reading Frequency					
Past week: all 5 days	57	57	63	68	60
Past week: no (0) days	25	21	16	18	21
Average days read paper	3.3	3.4	3.7	3.8	3.5
Father's Daily Reading Frequency					
Past week: all 5 days	65	66	70	75	67
Past week: no (0) days	14	15	13	12	15
Average days read paper	3.7	3.8	3.9	4.1	3.8
(N)[2] =	(296)	(241)	(230)	(204)	(680)
Mother's Sunday Paper Reading					
Past month: all 4 Sundays	70	69	74	73	72
Past month: no (0) Sundays	6	9	5	6	6
Average issues read	3.3	3.2	3.4	3.4	3.3
(N)[3] =	(270)	(223)	(210)	(202)	(630)

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1) Based on total adult respondents, 89% of whom were mothers.

2) Based on estimates of father's reading reported by mother in households where a male parent was present.

3) Based on households getting one or more Sunday papers in past month.

newspaper reading habits is much less commonly available to them. For this sizable (and in the case of racial minorities growing) segment of young America, the presence of the newspaper in classrooms becomes even more critical in fostering adult reading habits.[1]

Newspaper Content Preferences of Mothers

We asked mothers how often they usually read or look at nineteen specific parts of the daily paper: most or some of the time or never. Their answers show that educational differences, one of the most prominent indicators of social class, not only affect the availability and readership of newspapers. They also strongly influence the importance that various types of newspaper content have for the children's mothers, which may in turn subtly influence the way children themselves come to value the newspaper, especially if certain parts of the paper become the subject of conversation or comment between them. (That this possibility is more than mere speculation will be shown in later sections.)

Only four parts of the paper regularly engage the attention of a majority or near-majority of the mothers: local news, national news, personal advice columns, and the traditional women's pages of the daily paper (see table 7). Foreign news, entertainment coverage (listings, gossip items), display advertising, obituaries and editorial pages

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1) For further evidence on this point, see Daily Newspapers in American Classrooms (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1979), another report in this series.

Table 6

Economic and Social Factors in Mothers' Newspaper Readership: Daily and Sunday

	Proportion of Mothers Who:		
	Read a Daily Yesterday	Read a Daily Regularly (5 x Week)	Read a Sunday Regularly[1] (4 x Month)
Total Sample of Mothers	66%	60%	72%
Mother's Education			
Less than high school grad.	51	44	60
High school graduate	68	62	75
Some college, plus	77	75	77
Family Income			
Less than $10,000	46	40	53
$10,000 - $19,999	69	61	75
$20,000 plus	79	75	80
Mother's Employment Status			
Works full time	68	61	72
Works part time	71	68	76
Housewife	65	59	73
Family Structure			
Both male & female heads	70	64	75
Single parent head	51	43	57
Race			
White families	69	64	75
Non-white families	52	43	60

1) Based only on households in each category getting one or more Sunday papers in past month.

comprise another layer of interest, read regularly by one-third or more of the women. A third set of items, read regularly by about one-fourth or less, includes classified ads, comics, social news (perhaps surprisingly low in readership), and hobby or gardening items. Fewer than one in five mothers regularly read sports or financial coverage, political columnists, or such features as sports, book reviews, and puzzles.

Table 7

Mothers' Preferences for Different Parts of the Daily Paper
(In Percentages)

Parts of Daily Paper Read Most of the Time (N) =	Total Mothers (817)	Education of Mothers: Less Than H.S. Grad. (230)	H.S. Grad. (374)	Some College, Plus (211)
Local news	73	60	77	82
National news	55	36	56	73
Personal advice (e.g., Dear Abby)	49	44	54	47*
Women's pages (fashion, foods, recipes)	47	40	48	53
Foreign news (countries, wars)	42	28	38	63
Ads other than classified	39	39	39	40*
Obituaries	38	36	43	33*
Entertainment listings, reviews	36	30	38	40
Editorials, Editors' pages	35	24	35	47
Stories about celebrities, show business	33	30	35	34*
Classified ads	29	35	29	23*
Comics or jokes	27	18	29	31
Social news (weddings, parties)	24	25	25	21*
Hobbies, gardening	23	18	24	25
Political columnists	18	14	16	28
Sports	17	11	19	20
Book reviews, ads	16	10	15	25
Puzzles or games	11	4	14	11*
Financial, business news	10	7	8	16

In all but seven cases (shown with an asterisk in Table 7), the higher the educational attainment the greater the readership of the listed items. While the magnitude of some differences may be affected by a "prestige bias" in claiming readership to which the college-trained may be less immune, on the whole the data show the latter group to be regularly involved with significantly more parts of the paper, and especially those dealing with hard news or editorials: foreign news, national news, editorials and local news. This keener interest in news, moreover, is not restricted to newspaper reading habits alone. It is also characteristic of the better-educated with respect to TV news-watching, radio news-listening, and subscriptions to newsweeklies.

What these findings clearly show is that higher levels of formal education appreciably widen the effective scope of interests of women in the child-rearing years. So too does employment: other data from the survey (not shown here) confirm the fact that mothers holding full- or part-time jobs also display higher levels of readership of hard news items than do housewives[1]. It is reasonable to infer that such deeper interests are in various ways conveyed to their children, thus conferring upon the children of better educated mothers additional advantages that play a role in their political socialization.

Mothers' Views on Children's Newspaper Reading

So far we have been assuming that variations in parental reading habits and the availability of the newspapers in the home can have

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1) This finding has been confirmed by another recent Newspaper Readership Project survey. See Women and Newspapers in the 1970s (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1979).

significant implications for the forming of their children's perspectives on the newspaper. Parents' behavior, in other words, conveys messages about their values and attitudes to their children. Some other data from the survey can test this assumption, by showing how prevailing parental attitudes about the value of newspapers for their children differ among families. First, how aware are mothers of their children's reading of newspapers? Do they approve of them reading newspapers? Do they actively encourage their children to read by talking about items in the paper or bringing them to the attention of their children?

Mothers were asked these questions about each child who was also interviewed. Thus, the answers apply specifically to individual children, rather than simply expressing their mothers' general knowledge or attitudes. In describing these findings, therefore, our focus must shift from the 817 households to the 1,156 children in the study who were the subjects of the questions put to their mothers.

First, mothers seem to be alert to the fact of their children's use of newspapers. Fifty-four percent of the children were said to be readers, and 41 percent were not; in only 5 percent of the cases were mothers unable to say whether or not their children were newspaper readers. And the proportion of children asserted to be readers by their mothers agreed closely with the children's own claims, age group by age group (see Table 8).

Table 8

Mothers and Children as Sources on Children's Newspaper Reading
(In Percentages)

		Age of Children: 6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17	Total Children
	(N) =	(345)	(283)	(275)	(253)	(1,156)
Mother:	Child reads the paper	34	52	67	72	54
Child:	Ever read a paper	33	60	74	81	61

The convergence between mothers and children in the aggregate is closest for the youngest group, who are presumably more consistently under the watchful eye of their mothers. But an opportunity factor -- the availability of newspapers in the home -- which, as we saw earlier, is only weakly correlated with the age of children in the household, is significantly linked with mothers' claims about their children's newspaper reading. In households where the newspaper was available all five weekdays (through purchase or home delivery), 63 percent of the children were said to be newspaper readers. This is in sharp contrast with the 49 percent of children in homes where the newspaper was available less regularly, or the barely 17 percent of children who, according to their mothers, read the newspaper in homes where the daily paper was not available at all. Thus, even with the low threshold for reading represented by the question put to the children's mothers, "Does (child) read the daily newspaper?", sizable variations

in perceived reading appear as a result of the sheer availability of the daily paper on a weekly basis.[1]

Age and availability of newspapers in the home seem to account for much of the differences in children's reading perceived by their mothers. No other variables showed differences of comparable magnitude. Indeed, the social class factors examined earlier, which were closely correlated with availability and also with variations in parental newspaper reading failed to show appreciable differences in the proportion of children who read newspapers, as witnessed by their mothers.

The attitudes taken by mothers toward newspaper reading by their children were generally highly favorable. The mothers of one-third "strongly approved" and those of another 52 percent "approved" of their child reading newspapers. A miniscule 2 percent of children had mothers who disapproved. Given this overwhelmingly positive stance, the only substantial differences appeared in the intensity of approval (or feelings of indifference) expressed by the mothers. And in the voicing of strong approval, certain class values were apparent, joining age of children and availability of the daily paper as noticeable sources of variation. These latter differences are, however, mainly a matter of emphasis: approval of children's newspaper reading is quite general among mothers in all families (see table 9).

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1) The impact of availability on the children's own assertions about newspaper reading is detailed in another report in this series, Children and Newspapers (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1980).

Table 9

Attitude of Mothers Toward Their Children's Newspaper Reading
(In Percentages)

	Attitude Toward Newspaper:				
	Strongly Approve	Approve	Disapprove (Incl. strongly)	Doesn't Matter To Me/NA[1]	100%= (N)
Total Sample of Children	33	52	2	13	(1156)
By Age of Child					
6-8	20	58	3	18	(345)
9-11	31	53	3	13	(283)
12-14	38	50	-	12	(275)
15-17	46	45	-	10	(253)
By Weekly Newspaper Availability					
Available all 5 weekdays	37	51	2	11	(832)
Available some weekdays	24	58	1	17	(158)
No (0) weekdays	19	53	2	26	(166)
By Mother's Education					
Less than high school graduate	25	57	2	16	(321)
High school graduate	30	55	2	14	(543)
Some college, plus	45	42	1	11	(290)
By Family Income					
Less than $10,000	25	59	2	14	(284)
$10,000 - $19,999	30	54	2	14	(408)
$20,000 plus	43	43	2	12	(347)

1) Mothers saying "it doesn't matter" accounted for most (9-12%) of the percentages shown in this response category.

The most direct evidence of parental intervention in their children's newspaper reading practices is found in mothers' answers to the last of the three questions cited at the beginning of this section of the report. The findings strongly support our earlier surmise that active efforts to encourage a child's awareness and use of the newspapers are seen as an appropriate stimulus by a majority of mothers. They also display the contrasting sense of values in this regard that exists among mothers, variations that mainly run along now-familiar lines of social cleavage (see table 10).

Some mother-child discussions about things in the newspaper are part of the experience of 70 percent of children. The older they are, the more likely are such conversations to take place. But the most striking differences in the proportion of children exposed to this kind of stimulus appear in homes where the newspaper is available to varying degrees, in families at different class levels, and among children with working or housebound mothers.

The value of the newspaper for children as a source of conversational topics for mothers is clearly greater the more frequently it comes into the home. But, as we saw earlier, availability is itself closely related to variations in the social and economic status of families. Thus, it is not surprising to find the newspaper entering significantly more often into conversations between mothers and children in higher status families (whether measured by education or income), or in two-parent or white households. All of these interrelated measures of family social position weigh heavily in

Table 10

Mother's Stimulation of Children's Newspaper Reading
(In Percentages)

	Proportion of Children[1]	100% = (N)
Total Sample of Children	70	(1156)
By Age of Child		
6- 8	61	(345)
9-11	70	(283)
12-14	74	(275)
15-17	78	(253)
By Weekly Newspaper Availability		
Available all 5 weekdays	77	(832)
Available some weekdays	60	(158)
No (0) weekdays	42	(166)
By Mother's Education		
Less than high school graduate	56	(321)
High school graduate	73	(543)
Some college, plus	79	(290)
By Family Income		
Less than $10,000	57	(284)
$10,000 - $19,999	68	(408)
$20,000 plus	81	(347)
By Family Structure		
Both male and female heads	72	(940)
Single parent head	57	(216)
By Race		
White	73	(909)
Non-white	58	(226)
By Mother's Employment Status		
Works full time	75	(275)
Works part time	80	(143)
Housewife	68	(566)

1) Question: "Do you ever talk to (child) about things in the newspaper or bring them to (his/her) attention?"

determining the prominence of the newspaper in the households of the children. Working mothers, who are more frequent readers and more attuned to hard news than housewives, are also somewhat more likely to draw on the newspaper in discussions with their children.

These findings complement and extend earlier ones by showing that children in families where the newspaper is a more prominent feature -- available more regularly, read more often and extensively by parents -- not only have their parents' evident reliance on newspapers to draw upon as models for their own behavior. They are also more likely to have their attention actively drawn to the value of the newspaper through the encouraging words of their mother.

Living with Television: Availability and Household Use

Television's pervasiveness in the families of this generation of children and adolescents has been established by numerous recent studies.[1] Data from this survey update the findings of other studies and go beyond them in several ways, by documenting the television use and preferences of children ranging more widely in age (6-17) than is typical of earlier studies and by relating their television behavior to other media use, newspapers in particular.

The availability of television to children is universal. Almost all (99.4%) homes had at least one set in working order. Three-fifths

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1) An exhaustive review of research on television use and effects is provided in George Comstock et al., Television and Human Behavior (Columbia University Press, 1978), especially chapter 5 dealing with children -- "one highly attracted public" in the authors' phrase.

(59%) had more than one set, a proportion that rises to two-thirds in the homes of teenagers. In fact, over one-third (35%) of the children had a set of their own, or one available primarily for their use. The availability of a set for the child's personal use varied from 25 percent for 6-8 year olds to 45 percent for the older teenagers. Those in poorer or less socially advantaged homes had correspondingly fewer sets available to them (see table 11).

On an average weekday a TV set was on for 6 hours. This average estimate by mothers conceals some important variations. In the homes of 26 percent (termed "heavy TV" households later on in this analysis), a set was on for 9 hours or more; in another 42 percent, a set was on 5-8 hours, leaving one-third of children's homes in which a set was on 4 hours or less. HUT level estimates were appreciably lower in the families of college-educated mothers and those with incomes over $20,000. But they hardly varied in homes with children of different ages, a fact that corresponds with the children's own reported watching of television.

Mothers' own TV watching also showed comparable variations. About one-half said they watched television for 3 hours or more. Watching was appreciably greater among those with the least education or income, among nonwhite mothers, and housewives. It varied little among mothers of younger or older children. The same patterns appear in mothers' estimates of the average time spent watching TV daily by the children's fathers, although family differences are more muted in this regard.

Table 11

Availability and Household Use of TV in Children's Families

	Ave. No. of TV Sets	Ave. Daily HUT Level (minutes)	Ave. Time Mother Watches TV (minutes)	Ave. Time Father Watches TV[1] (minutes)
Total Sample of Families	1.9	361	173	148
By Age of Child				
6- 8	1.7	360	174	145
9-11	1.8	360	169	138
12-14	2.0	357	160	143
15-17	2.1	375	171	163
By Mother's Education				
Less than HS Graduate	1.6	375	208	151
HS Graduate	2.0	381	168	161
Some College, plus	2.1	309	142	120
By Family Income				
Less than $10,000	1.5	377	206	159
$10,000 - 19,999	1.8	378	167	149
$20,000 plus	2.2	331	149	141
By Race				
White	1.9	357	162	147
Non-white	1.7	370	219	152

1) Based on mothers' reports in families where a male household head was present.

Thus, in these basic respects, television establishes a lively presence in children's families: available universally; in more than one room in a majority of homes; broadcasting images and sounds during an average of one-third of the family's waking hours; and at the center of their parents' attention for substantial amounts of that time.

Parental Attitudes Toward Children's Use of TV

The implicit stamp of approval represented by these facts is made explicit by the data on mothers' attitudes toward their children's TV-watching. When asked specifically about each child, over three-quarters (77%) of their mothers expressed approval of his or her watching TV, and another 11 percent expressed indifference. Family differences were insignificant in this regard: the general climate in American homes is supportive and approving of children's use of television (see table 12).

Table 12

Mothers' Attitudes Toward Their Children's TV Watching

	Proportion whose mothers say:				
	Strongly Approve	Approve	Disapprove (including strongly)	Doesn't Matter to Me/NA	100%= (N)
Total Sample of Children	8	69	10	13	(1156)
By Age of Child					
6- 8	10	70	9	11	(345)
9-11	7	69	11	13	(283)
12-14	7	68	11	14	(275)
15-17	9	68	7	16	(253)

This is not to say that a situation of laissez-faire exists in most families when it comes to children's TV-viewing. In the homes of 58 percent of the children, parents set rules to control the kinds of TV programs they can watch. And 44 percent of the children confront parental rules about how much TV they can watch. Parents use tactics of encouragement as well. Mothers of 57 percent of the children said they make suggestions or encourage their child to watch particular programs.[1] Thus, both constraint and prodding are among the tools frequently used by parents to discipline and guide their children's use of television.

Parental control or guidance of children's TV-viewing is primarily a function of two variables: the age of the child and the family's social class position. Rule-setting of both types is at its peak for the very youngest group of children, those age 6-8, as is positive encouragement by their mothers to watch certain programs. The incidence of both modes of parental control drops off sharply for progressively older children (see table 13). By the late teens, only about one-quarter of the children are said to confront family rules about their use of television; only two-fifths (42%) of those age 15-17 ever receive specific program suggestions from their mothers. The

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1) When asked which programs, mothers mentioned a wide variety of specific programs or generic categories of programs. The latter type predominated: "educational" (27%), "children's specials" (22%), "documentaries" (16%), "dramas, serials or plays" (13%), and "children's shows" (11%). The most often-mentioned specific program was "Sesame Street", which 13% of the children were encouraged to watch, most of whom were in the 6-8 year age group.

Table 13

Family Rules and Suggestions about Children's TV Watching[1]

	Proportion who say:		
	Has rules about what kind of TV programs to watch	Has rules about how much TV child can watch	Encourages child to watch certain programs
Total Sample of Children	58%	44%	57%
By Age of Child			
6- 8	72	57	66
9-11	69	50	60
12-14	54	40	54
15-17	29	24	42
By Mother's Education			
Less than HS Graduate	51	41	40
HS Graduate	62	45	59
Some College, plus	59	45	73
By Family Income			
Less than $10,000	50	44	42
$10,000 - 19,999	63	47	57
$20,000 plus	64	42	71
By Race			
White	61	43	61
Non-white	47	47	43
By Daily Household TV Use			
Heavy (set on 9 hours+)	52	35	48
Moderate (set on 5-8 hours)	61	45	58
Light (set on 4 hours-)	59	49	62

1) The data reported here are based on mothers' responses about each of the children selected for interview.

sharpest breaks in parental controls occur at about the age children enter senior high school. At any age parents are almost equally likely to set rules for both sons and daughters.

The use of these two tactics to control a child's television exposure is also related to a family's class position. The children of better-educated or more affluent parents are more likely to confront rules about TV-viewing and much more likely to get suggestions that they watch certain types of programs. The higher the class position, as indicated by mother's education or by family income, the more the balance shifts toward positive encouragement. Thus, families differ not only in the extent to which they seek to control TV use by children but also in the style with which they go about doing so. Such differences are also apparent in homes making heavier or lighter use of television. The less they watch TV themselves, the more likely parents are to try to guide as well as limit their children's use of TV.

Radio Listening in the Family

To round out our coverage of family use of the mass media, we asked each mother a few questions about household and children's use of the radio. The general consistency of responses, in which only insignificant variations were found in overall use or programs heard, permits us to summarize the results briefly.

Radios are present in almost all (99%) of the homes. On the average weekday, a radio set is on for 3-1/3 hours in the home,

slightly less in homes with 6-8 year olds and increasingly (but not much) more in the homes of progressively older children. No differences of any consequence were found in the homes of families with different social backgrounds.

Mothers' own reported radio listening at home or in the car was equally consistent, averaging just under 2-1/2 hours across almost all groups. Depending upon the specific question asked, between 5 and 12 percent claimed not to listen to the radio at all. Housewives, not surprisingly, listened to the radio about one-half hour longer (163 vs. 129 minutes) than full-time working mothers. But mothers in "heavy TV" homes listened as much as those in "light TV" homes, and no marked differences were found among mothers in homes into which a daily newspaper came regularly or less often. It is evident from this that radio has found its own niche in the schedules of these women, and coexists comfortably with the other media. From the data on exposure to both radio and TV it can also be inferred that one or another of the broadcast media is on almost constantly in the home.

Asked what kinds of radio programs they usually listen to, the mothers spontaneously mentioned the following: music (by 82%), news (by 32%), weather (by 16%), and talk shows (by 11%). No noteworthy differences were observed in the patterns of response of mothers in various groups or categories. Radio listening seems to fit easily into their daily round of activities.

Mothers were usually aware of their children's radio listening, and here some differences emerged in the perceived use of the radio by children of differing ages. Among 6-8 year olds, 59 percent were said to listen to the radio, a proportion that grew to 92 percent of those age 15-17. Overall, 77 percent of the children were radio listeners, according to their mothers.

Finally, each child's mother was asked how she felt about the child listening to the radio. In almost all cases, the attitude was either one of approval (81%)[1] or indifference (14%), a near-unanimity that did not vary with the child's family background. Only a bare 2 percent of the children had mothers who expressed any disapproval. Clearly, a child's use of the radio in the home creates little cause for family controversy.

Magazines and Books in the Family

The inclusion of books and magazines with newspapers, radio and television under the category of "mass communications media" is arguable. They are not produced daily for immediate consumption, nor is any published in quantities that rival daily newspapers, nor are their contents made freely available in the home as are TV and radio broadcasts. Yet the audience of consumers of books and magazines is very substantial, and they are obviously important sources of

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1) The mothers of 14 percent of the children "strongly approve" of them listening to the radio. The comparable proportion for mothers' attitudes toward their children's newspaper reading was 33%, and their TV watching 8%.

information and entertainment to which children can be exposed in the home. Moreover, they can compete with newspapers and the broadcast media for time and attention or, conversely, be displaced by the latter. It is appropriate, therefore, that their place in children's homes be studied, especially as a potential influence on children's orientations to print media. Findings on their prevalence in the home may shed light on the often-stated claim that the newspaper reading of today's generation of children is affected adversely by a general disaffection with things in print, felt by parents as well as children.

As with the analysis of other media, our initial assumption is that their availability in the home and parents' attitudes about magazines and books can serve to foster or impede the development of children's interest in them. Here we will deal with the "supply side" of this assumption by reviewing data on household availabilities and parental reading patterns and attitudes.

One or more magazines is brought into 72 percent of children's homes. The prevalence of magazines in the home is significantly related to the social class position of the families, but does not vary with the ages of their children. Fewer than one-half of families least favorably situated (minority, low income, low education) took any magazines on a regular basis. Book-purchasing or borrowing by parents was equally strongly correlated with social class position. Annual book-buying or borrowing estimates were two to three times greater for higher-status families than for those in the lowest status categories. The frequency of book reading by mothers and fathers

broke sharply along the same class lines; mothers generally read books more often than the children's fathers (see table 14).

One additional set of findings shows the influential role played by social class on parents' orientations to or use of all print media. The household availability of newspapers in the home on a regular or less frequent basis, itself closely related to parents' income and education, is in turn correlated with the presence of magazines and books in the home and with parents' book reading. Children growing up in socially deprived families, therefore, are much less likely to come into contact with any of the print media on a regular basis, or have the example put before them of their parents' reliance upon the printed word.

Parents' Attitudes About the Print Media for Children

Do mothers' attitudes about children's book and magazine reading vary with their own use of these two print media? Or is there a widely-prevalent attitude among mothers that reading is good for children, a viewpoint that is essentially unrelated to their own reading behavior? The truth lies closer to the latter alternative.

Endorsements of books and magazines as reading matter for the children were nearly unanimous and often warmly expressed. Ninety-four percent of the children had mothers who approved of their reading of books; 57 percent found "strong approval". (Only three children had mothers who disapproved in any way.) Attitudes about magazine reading were almost equally positively slanted; it was

Table 14

Availability of Magazines and Involvement with Books in Children's Families

	Magazine(s) Taken Regularly	Average Annual No. Books Bought or Borrowed	Mother Ever Reads a Book	Father[1] Ever Reads a Book
Total Sample of Families	72%	21	68%	54%
By Mother's Education				
Less than HS Graduate	48	13	47	42
HS Graduate	77	20	69	52
Some College, plus	92	30	89	72
By Family Income				
Less than $10,000	46	12	51	34
$10,000 - 19,999	78	22	69	54
$20,000 plus	91	30	81	67
By Race				
White	79	24	73	58
Non-white	47	7	47	41
By Weekly Newspaper Availability				
Available all 5 weekdays	80	22	72	59
Available some weekdays	58	18	61	43
Available no (0) weekdays	39	14	32	20

1) Based on mothers' reports in families with a male household head present.

approved of as an activity by the mothers of 87 percent of the children (28% "strongly"). Mothers from different family backgrounds varied only in the warmth of their endorsements, not in their generally approving stance toward reading.[1]

Mothers also seem to be aware of the extent to which children are reading books and magazines, and try to exercise some influence over the content of their children's reading matter. Two-thirds of the children were said to be magazine readers and four out of five readers of books other than for school. Younger children read books appreciably more often and magazines less often than teenagers, according to their mothers. Family background affected children's perceived use of both print media in familiar ways: the higher the family's social position the more often was the child seen to be a reader (see table 15).

Attempts to regulate what children read in the home were fairly uniform across all families. Rules were said to exist for about three out of five children up to the age of 14; after that, parental vigilance drops off. Families in the lowest and highest categories of income and education less often had rules, probably for somewhat different reasons -- lower-status children read less, while active regulation by higher-status parents might be seen to conflict with their strong approval of reading or their generally more permissive child-rearing values.

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1) The three print media -- books, newspapers and magazines -- were the ones that mothers approved of most strongly of all the media about which they were asked.

Table 15

Mothers' Awareness of and Control Over Their Children's Reading

	Proportion who say:		
	Child Reads Magazines	Child Reads Non School Books	Family Has Rules About What Child Brings Home to Read
Total Sample of Children	67%	79%	57%
By Age of Child			
6- 8	52	85	61
9-11	65	85	62
12-14	75	76	60
15-17	79	70	43
By Mother's Education			
Less than HS Graduate	58	70	55
HS Graduate	68	81	63
Some College, plus	74	87	49
By Family Income			
Less than $10,000	57	69	53
$10,000 - $19,999	67	80	63
$20,000 plus	74	87	56
By Race			
White	70	83	58
Non-white	54	66	53

Control or encouragement of children's reading habits can take other forms than by the example set by parents or by rulemaking. Reading can also be promoted by buying children books and by reading to them when they are young. In the past year, 53 percent of the children got books as a gift from their parents, a proportion that declines sharply with the children's ages and that climbs equally steeply as one ascends the social ladder. When younger, eight out of nine children had books read to them by their parents, a form of encouragement that was less common only among children in the lowest status categories (see table 16).

To summarize, these findings reflect the fact that the family climate surrounding most children's reading of books and magazines is strongly supportive. Reading is a highly valued activity even in homes where parents themselves do less of it. Mothers are aware of their children's reading habits, and, in a majority of cases, concerned enough about what they are reading to try to regulate their children's home reading fare. The majority of parents actively seek to encourage their children's reading, especially in the early years, by giving them books and reading to them. The principal differences observed stem from the contrasting economic resources and lifestyles associated with a family's social position, which condition the availability of reading matter in the home and the parents' own use of the print media.

Table 16

Parents' Encouragement of Children's Book Reading

	Proportion who say:	
	Bought Books as a Gift for Their Child	Read Books to Child When Younger
Total Sample of Children	53%	88%
By Age of Child		
6- 8	71	90
9-11	59	88
12-14	42	85
15-17	31	87
By Mother's Education		
Less than HS Graduate	35	77
HS Graduate	57	91
Some College, plus	64	93
By Family Income		
Less than $10,000	35	74
$10,000 - 19,999	57	92
$20,000 plus	64	93
By Race		
White	57	92
Non-white	35	70

CONTACT WITH THE WIDER WORLD: THE PLACE OF NEWS

Our analysis has been focused so far on the narrow confines of home and family. Information provided by mothers has been used to examine the prominence of the mass media in the household, the attention paid to them by parents, and the attitudinal climate that envelops a child's own media use. The actual substance carried into the home by the various media has been touched on only fleetingly, chiefly in our analysis of mothers' newspaper reading.

In this final section of our report, we will single out news as one type of information conveyed by the mass media. The place of news in the home deserves special treatment in a study of children's media behavior for several reasons. First, media news forms a crucial part of the total flow of experiences, words and images out of which a child's social and political awareness is built. Second, the family performs a powerful gatekeeping role, especially for younger children, in controlling this flow and providing the child with a framework for interpretation. Events that are novel or incomprehensible, seen from the child's naive perspective, are often given meaning by a parent's casual or pointed reactions conveyed to the child through gestures or comments. Thus, the volume of news entering the home via the media has important implications for the child's mental and social development, especially for the growth of his fund of knowledge and attitudes about the wider world outside the family.

The extent to which news is carried into the home and made available to children via newspapers was fully detailed in our earlier analysis.[1] Only a few summary points need to be recalled in this context. Over six out of ten homes take a paper every weekday and Sunday; nine out of ten take the paper at least occasionally. The vast majority of parents are regular or occasional readers; readership is more extensive the higher the family's socioeconomic status. Hard news items, those dealing with local, national, and foreign news, were first, second, and fifth-ranked by mothers out of a list of 19 types of newspaper editorial content read most often. And, seven out of ten children have things in the newspaper brought to their attention by their mothers. To be sure, not all of these items had to be news stories. But, given the mothers' manifest interest in news it is reasonable to assume that at least some had the capacity to widen the children's mental horizons.

As these findings attest, the contribution made by newspapers to the daily flow of news into the home is substantial. The last-noted finding further suggests that an information chain linking news in newspapers directly to children through their parents' mediating actions exists in a majority of families.[2]

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1) See above, pp. 14-31 and tables 4-9.

2) The success achieved by parents' efforts to excite their children's interest in the newspaper, and the effects of children's own readership of newspapers on their political socialization are discussed in Children and Newspapers (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1980), another report in this series.

The perceived value of the newspaper as a source of news for children is also apparent in mothers' attitudes toward the use of newspapers in their children's classrooms. The idea was favored by the mothers of 82 percent of the children, and the two specific contributions most often cited were: as a source of news on current events (by 41%) and as a source of news on world or international events (by 25%). If children fail to make better use of the newspaper as a news source, in most cases it is not for lack of maternal approval.

Another important contributor to the flow of news into the home is television. A full assessment of that contribution is not possible to make with the data at hand from this survey,[1] which are based on mothers' answers to a question about 19 types of TV programs that they "usually watch". But, despite their limitations, the data show news to be highly valued as a type of TV program content. "Local news" was usually watched by 70 percent, network news by 47 percent, and "documentaries or news specials" by 34 percent. These three news-related program types placed first, fourth and ninth in frequency of mention out of the list of TV program types -- a strong showing in relation to the entertainment fare that is usually identified as having the greatest popular appeal.

As noted earlier, in the analysis devoted to household use of TV, 57 percent of children received some specific suggestions from

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1) For other findings on adult TV news-viewing based on a 1977 nationwide sample of over 3,000 households, see The Daily Diet of News (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1978).

their mothers about what they should watch. "Documentaries" and "news" were the only news-related items specifically suggested with any frequency, and both were clearly secondary to "educational" programming, "children's specials or shows", and "nature" programs as the kinds of programs mothers wanted their children to watch. Underlying almost all of these scattered suggestions, however, is a clear preference for shows that inform the mind of the child.

News enters the homes by radio as well: without prompting, only 32 percent of the mothers freely mentioned radio news as one of the types of programs they usually listen to, but when specifically probed by a follow-up question, the proportion who usually listen to news climbed to 78 percent. This proportion hardly varied among mothers from different family backgrounds. These few data provide only vague indications of the reliance on radio for news in the average home. Findings from other surveys show its contribution to be substantial, especially as an initial source of news about major stories and in its coverage of fast-breaking news stories.[1]

News also comes into the home between the covers of magazines, especially newsweeklies. Almost three-quarters (72%) of homes took at least one magazine on a regular basis. Among those recalled by name on an unaided basis, the newsweeklies came into 20 percent of homes taking any magazines, a proportion that held constant across the homes of children in all age groups. The major newsweeklies

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1) See The Daily Diet of News (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1978).

were more often an ingredient of the generally richer diet of news media consumed by higher status families than by the media-poorer families lower on the social ladder.

What's in the News: Family Conversations

The news that the media make plentifully available provides boundless topics for family conversation. We asked both mothers and children about ten categories of news stories. Mothers were asked how often each came up as a topic of conversation in the family; children were asked how interested they were in each topic. Our concern here is with the former: the place of these news topics as grist for the family conversational mill.

The topics were deliberately selected to represent major categories of news stories that receive constant media coverage -- inflation, unemployment, crime, local and national government, international events, etc. These topics, as many studies have shown, also form the agenda of greatest concern to public opinion, a concern that is largely shaped by their prominence in the mass media.[1] What is their place as topics discussed within the intimate confines of the family, rather than as issues of potential concern to the mass public?

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1) On this point, see Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media", Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 36 (1972), pp. 176-87; G. Ray Funkhouser, "The Issues of the Sixties: An Exploratory Study in the Dynamics of Public Opinion", Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 37 (1973), pp. 62-75.

The ten topics, phrased to emphasize their substance rather than their status as issues, broke down into three fairly distinct groupings (see table 17). The number one topic in most families was the rising cost of living. Fairly close to the problem of inflation as a focal point for frequent family conversation was news about the schools. These two stood somewhat apart in their evident importance from three others that formed a second cluster of interests: neighborhood happenings, youthful drug use, and news about crimes and robberies.

Table 17

News as Topics of Family Conversation[1]
(In Percentages)

Topic	Proportion Saying Topic Discussed: Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely/Never
The rising cost of living	81	14	5
What's happening in the schools	68	26	6
Things that happen in your neighborhood	53	33	14
Young people using drugs	48	37	15
Crimes and robberies	45	41	14
What your local government is doing	28	44	28
Unemployment	26	39	35
What President Carter is doing	23	44	33
Pollution problems	20	43	37
What's going on in other countries	18	46	36

1) Based on mothers' reports about each of the ten news topics.

The interpretative thread that binds these topics together and perhaps explains why they crop up so much more often in family conversations than the remaining five is that each of them is intimately linked with the welfare or community standing of the family unit. Three of them -- inflation, drug use, and crime -- pose direct and obvious threats to the family through the victimization of its members. The other two deal with social structures -- school and neighborhood -- that link families together into a community. (Had we asked about a third -- the church -- it might have joined these two as a conversational topic of equally lively interest.)

From this perspective, the remaining topics -- local government, unemployment, presidential actions, pollution and foreign events -- seem matters of much more distant concern to families. Any of these could of course rapidly become a topic of greater urgency rivaling those talked about more often, if they visibly began to affect a family member or the entire family. But, despite the outpouring of news on all these topics, conveyed daily by most of the news media into every home, the family agenda does not simply reflect the cumulative news story priorities of the day. Rather what is talked about within the family most often are those things that in some way or other seem to stimulate family members' collective interests.

By comparing the frequency with which these topics are discussed in selected types of families, we can find further clues as to how this process works (see table 18). Families with college-trained mothers -- generally more affluent and socially concerned -- typically

talk more often about almost all of these newsworthy topics than do other families. The three exceptions, each presumably reflecting a lesser degree of experience with it as a problem, are youthful drug use, crime and unemployment.

Table 18

Family Conversations: News Frequently Discussed in Selected Types of Families

(In Percentages)

	Mothers Report Frequent Discussion:				
	All Families	Families w/College-Trained Mothers	Families w/income Under $10,000	Non-White Families	Single Parent Families
(N) =	(817)	(211)	(209)	(157)	(162)
The rising cost of living	81%	82%	77%	73%	74%
What's happening in the schools	68	77	57	61	70
Things that happen in your neighborhood	53	56	53	55	44
Young people using drugs	48	41	51	46	49
Crimes and robberies	45	39	55	65	53
What your local government is doing	28	38	15	20	16
Unemployment	26	22	43	50	40
What President Carter is doing	23	37	17	17	14
Pollution problems	20	28	18	19	17
What's going on in other countries	18	28	17	24	17

Compared with all families, and especially with those just discussed, families that are worst off economically, minority families, and those with only one parent in the house -- categories that substantially overlap with one another -- present a different mix of family concerns. Inflation and schools also head the list for these families. But conversations in all three types of households dwell much more often on unemployment and crime, issues that frequently afflict them personally. Local government affairs are even more often a neglected topic, perhaps because these groups feel unable to do much about them. (Low income and minority families also talk about schools slightly less often, perhaps for the same reason.)

It is reasonable to infer from these data that family values and needs, as interpreted by parents, act as strong organizing principles in processing the news that comes into the home. This process works in several ways: first by the choice of media entering the home (primarily in the case of the print media); then by the way in which parents selectively attend to the news; and finally by the highlighting given certain news topics through conversation in the family. The end result is an agenda of concerns taken from the media and elsewhere and molded to fit each family's unique constellation of interests.

Steady Work: A Concluding Note

We have seen that the mass media are extensively available in the homes of children, that they occupy substantial amounts of their

parents' time, and that they are seen in varying degrees as sources of both helpful and harmful influences on the children's development. Parents generally approve of the media for their children, but a majority makes some efforts to control their intake, especially that of younger children.

Thus, the family exerts an active force in shaping the relationships created between children and the media in most homes. Even older children, for whom rules about media use are much less prevalent, still receive a good deal of parental guidance about their use of the mass media. Moreover, although obscured by the one-time measures used in this survey, parental influence can be presumed to be cumulative as well as continuous during the growing years of the child.

The powerful mediating role that parents play -- by their example, actions and attitudes -- must be kept at the forefront of attention in promoting newspaper use by children. The most effective conditions fostering that use are homes in which the paper is regularly available[1] and is heavily relied upon and regularly read by the adults in the family. In this sense, the steady, day-by-day work of keeping the newspaper relevant for its current audience of adult readers has long-term implications for the generation growing up in their homes.

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1) Another Readership Project study that surveyed 1,048 children in Richmond, Virginia concluded that "the most important predictor of newspaper reading among students is the availability of newspapers in the home." See John B. Mauro, "Newspaper Readership Among Public School Children Grades 7-12", ANPA News Research Report No. 23 (October 31, 1979).

The editorial challenge is clear-cut: daily newspapers can help secure their hold on future readers not simply by increasing their appeal to children, but also and more fundamentally by enhancing the role that the paper plays in their parents' lives.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The following tables are provided for readers interested in obtaining a quick estimate of the stability of a given percentage or of the significance of the difference between two percentages.

Confidence Intervals for a Given Percentage
(at the 95% confidence level)

N (Base for %)	Reported Percentage 10 or 90%	20 or 80%	30 or 70%	40 or 60%	50%
500	2.6	3.5	4.0	4.3	4.4
250	3.7	5.0	5.7	6.1	6.2
200	4.2	5.5	6.3	6.8	6.9
150	4.8	6.4	7.3	7.8	8.0
100	5.9	7.8	9.0	9.6	9.8
50	8.3	11.1	12.7	13.6	13.9
25	11.8	15.7	18.0	19.2	19.6

Example: If a report shows that 20% of all sampled respondents (when N = 500) answer in a particular way, the chances are about 95 out of 100 that the true value lies within ±3.5% of that value, that is, that the range 16.5% - 23.5% contains the true value in the population.

Significance of Differences Between Percentages
(95% confidence level)

Average of the Bases of Percentages Being Compared	Average of Reported Percentages 10 or 90%	20 or 30%	30 or 70%	40 or 60%	50%
500	3.7	4.9	5.7	6.1	6.2
250	5.2	7.1	8.1	8.6	8.8
200	5.9	7.8	8.9	9.6	9.8
150	6.8	9.1	10.3	11.0	11.3
100	8.3	11.0	12.7	13.6	13.9
50	11.7	15.7	18.0	19.2	19.7
25	16.7	22.2	25.5	27.2	27.7

Example: A report shows that 33% of all respondents 30 to 39 years of age use a certain product and that only 27% of all respondents in the 40-to-49 age group use that product. Could this difference be due to chance?

In this example assume a base of 500 for both age groups. The average of the percentages (33 + 27) equals 30% and the difference between the percentages is 6%. Since 6% is greater than 5.7% (the figure in the table for this base and percentage) the chances are about 95 out of 100 that the product is used significantly more by the 30-39 age group.

The table values are based on an assumption of simple random sampling. The figures may be too large if a stratified sampling technique was used and probably are too small if a cluster sampling technique was utilized. (For formulas used, see Q. McNemar, Psychological Statistics, pages 54, 60.) The second table should be used with extreme caution if the bases being averaged are very different in size.